

WASHINGTON – Arizona Democrats and Republicans joined forces today to ask President Bush to reconsider the termination of Operation Jump Start, which has placed nearly 3,000 National Guardsmen along the U.S.-Mexico border since June 2006.

U.S. Reps. Harry Mitchell, Gabrielle Giffords, Jeff Flake, Trent Franks, Rick Renzi and John Shadegg told President Bush that they “fear the combined effect of a delay in virtual fencing and a further drawdown of National Guard along the border will make matters even worse.”

Operation Jump Start is scheduled to sunset July 15.

“We believe we need more resources at the border, not less, and respectfully request that you maintain Operation Jump Start along our southern border,” they said.

Mitchell previously urged President Bush to maintain the National Guard’s border presence last summer.

“I believe this is the wrong time to begin such a drawdown, and I urge you to reconsider,” Mitchell wrote on August 9, 2007.

He also wrote President Bush on February 28, after the General Accounting Office revealed problems with the virtual fence along the U.S.-Mexico border.

“Knowing that we are facing a delay in virtual border protection, I believe it is even more critical that we keep as much human border protection as possible, and I want to urge you again to stop the drawdown of National Guard troops along the border,” Mitchell wrote in February.

There is growing support to continue Operation Jump Start. On April 22, Governors Janet Napolitano of Arizona, Bill Richardson of New Mexico and Arnold Schwarzenegger of California asked Congressional leaders to extend and fully fund the operation. Napolitano had previously written to Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff asking him to continue the operation.

The following is the text of the letter:

May 8, 2008

The Honorable George W. Bush  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Mr. President:

We are deeply concerned about the anticipated termination of Operation Jump Start, which will result in the removal of nearly 3000 National Guardsmen from our southern border.

More than half of all illegal U.S.-Mexico border crossings occur in Arizona, and our state pays a hefty price as a result. We fear the combined effect of a delay in virtual fencing and a further drawdown of National Guard along the border will make matters even worse. Last year more than 380,000 apprehensions were made in the Tucson Sector of the border. Should the announced drawdown occur, Arizonans, and all Americans, will face an increased risk of drugs, crime, and violence resulting from illegal immigration.

Operation Jump Start has worked. According to U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, the Yuma Sector, which the recently delayed virtual fence project is designed to protect, experienced a 68 percent decrease in apprehensions between October 1, 2006 and July 31, 2007, compared with the previous year. Border-wide, the National Guard has helped seize more than 1080 vehicles used to transport drugs and/or illegal immigrants, more than 300,600 pounds of marijuana, and 5060 pounds of cocaine.

In the Fiscal Year 2008 Omnibus Appropriations, the House of Representatives approved funding for 3000 new Border Patrol agents. It also approved increased funding for Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the detention and removal of illegal immigrants.

We believe we need more resources at the border, not less, and respectfully request that you maintain Operation Jump Start along our southern border.

Sincerely,

Harry Mitchell  
Rick Renzi  
Gabrielle Giffords  
Trent Franks  
John Shadegg  
Jeff Flake  
MEMBERS OF CONGRESS